

on Capitol Hill—was largely unproductive. The results of the last national election, I think, verified the fact that most people were disappointed by the outcome of the 105th Congress. There were so many opportunities missed in that Congress, so many chances to make real changes to improve life in America that were squandered. We failed to address patients' rights, we failed to reduce tobacco use by our children, we failed to reform the sorry state of campaign financing, and increase the minimum wage. In each instance, we were stymied by the other side of the aisle that simply did not want to deal with these issues.

It appears that the only issue of great moment—and I say that advisedly—was the decision to rename Washington National Airport after our former President, Ronald Reagan. Sadly, many of my colleagues in the Senate, once they had achieved that, decided to go straight to the airport and catch a plane and go home instead of sticking around and working on the issues for which we were called to Washington.

I think the American people have other things on their minds, and I think they are looking to us for leadership.

I am happy at this point to yield the floor to the Democratic leader, our minority leader in the U.S. Senate, who will speak to the agenda which we will try to forcefully address during this session of Congress.

#### THE OTHER IMPORTANT WORK THIS CONGRESS MUST DO: AN AGENDA TO HELP AMERICA'S WORKING FAMILIES

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, for 3 full days now, this Senate has been sitting as a court of impeachment. We are only the second Senate in the history of our nation to sit in judgment of a President, and the first Senate ever to consider impeaching an elected President.

Deciding, ultimately, whether to overturn a free and democratic election is almost certainly the most awesome responsibility any of us will ever be called in our public lives to fulfill.

But it is not the only responsibility before this Senate, Mr. President. On many other urgent issues—from improving our children's schools, to passing HMO reform, to saving Social Security—the American people are waiting for us to act. They've been waiting—frankly, for too long. So today, on behalf of my fellow Democratic Senators, I am introducing our first bills of the 106th Congress.

Our proposals target the real needs of America's families and communities. They are relevant, not revolutionary. If they seem familiar, it's because most of what is in them we first introduced in the last Congress. But they did not pass, despite the support of the American people and, in some cases, by a bipartisan majority of Senators. We offer

them again in this Congress because the need for them has not diminished. In fact, it has grown.

#### SENATE DEMOCRATS' FIRST 5 BILLS

Our first bill is S. 6, the Patients' Bill of Rights. Democratic Senators spoke about this bill so often last year, trying to persuade our Republican colleagues to permit a vote on it, that I think we may all know it inside and out. In a nutshell, our Patients' Bill of Rights is based on a fundamental premise that insurance company accountants have no business practicing medicine. Decisions about medical care should be made by doctors and patients. Period.

The Patients Bill of Rights guarantees HMO patients the right to go to an emergency room, and see a medical specialist, when they need to.

It guarantees doctors the right to tell patients all their treatment options, not merely the cheapest ones. If you're being treated for an illness, or you're pregnant, the Patients' Bill of Rights allows you stay with your own doctor, even if your employer changes health plans. It guarantees parents the right to take their child to a pediatric specialist if they need one.

And it holds HMOs accountable for their decisions. If an HMO refuses to cover a prescription or procedure, our bill allows patients to appeal that decision to an independent third-party.

And, if a patient suffers serious harm as a result of insurance company's decision to delay or deny needed care, the Patients' Bill of Rights guarantees them the right to sue their insurer—the same way every other industry can be sued for its bad decisions.

We're pleased that our Republican colleagues say HMO reform will be a priority for them this year as well. That's progress. The plan they offered last year covered only 1 in 3 privately insured Americans and contained other major holes as well. We hope their new proposal will correct those problems. We also hope the Republican leadership will allow an open, honest debate on this issue. That would be further progress. If we can have that debate, we can pass a real Patients' Bill of Rights this year.

Our second bill, S. 7, is the Public Schools Excellence Act.

There are more children in America's public schools this year than ever before in our nation's history. These record enrollments are already causing serious teacher shortages. One way some schools are trying to deal with the shortages is by lowering standards for new teachers.

Over the next 10 years, continued enrollment increases and teacher retirements will require America's public schools to hire more than 2 million new teachers. If we don't act now, the need for new teachers will put ever more pressure on communities to lower their teaching standards.

Enacting a proposal by Senator MURRAY, we made a historic commitment last year to help local communities

hire 100,000 new teachers so they could reduce class size to an average of 18 students in first 3 grades, and give young children the personal attention and solid academic foundation they need.

This year, we are proposing a new partnership to increase both the quantity and quality of America's teachers. It is based on a proposal by Senator KENNEDY. We'll help local communities attract qualified new teachers by offering college scholarships to students and to professionals who want to switch careers. We'll also help them provide these new teachers with the intensive support they need—but too often do not get—during the first few years on the job. At the same time, we'll help communities keep good teachers who are already in the classroom, by providing them with the training they need to strengthen their skills, or learn new skills—like how to use computers in the classroom.

But even the best teachers can't teach, and students can't learn, in classrooms that are unsafe or crammed beyond capacity. That is why, as part of our education bill, we are also re-introducing our plan to help local communities repair and replace crumbling and overcrowded schools.

We all know the figures: According to the GAO, 14 million children in this country attend schools that require major renovations; and 7 million children attend schools with serious safety code violations such as asbestos, radon, and lead-based paint. Millions more children attend schools that hold far more students than they were designed for.

Our bill provides communities with reduced-rate bonds that will enable them to cut school construction and repair costs to local taxpayers by as much as 50 percent. Senators LAUTENBERG, ROBB, FEINSTEIN, and HARKIN have all helped put this proposal together.

More than 90 percent of America's children attend public schools. By strengthening their schools, we can give our children the skills to prosper in tomorrow's economy. But we also need to help families the tools to succeed in today's economy. That is the focus of Democrats' third bill, S. 8, the Income Security Enhancement Act.

For 20 years, beginning in the early 1970s, 80 percent of America's families didn't get a raise; their incomes stayed flat—even when they took on second or even third jobs. Fortunately, that's over. Since 1993, the average family income has gone up nearly \$2,000 per year.

One way we can keep that trend moving in the right direction is by increasing the minimum wage by \$1 over the next years—to \$6.15 per hour. We know from experience that raising the minimum wage doesn't hurt the economy. It doesn't kill jobs. What it does is help families, and reinforce our belief as a society in the dignity of work. We hope our Republican colleagues will join us in supporting this modest increase for

some of the hardest workers in our nation.

We are also hoping they will join us in supporting a true marriage penalty tax cut.

Last year, Republicans proposed a flat \$1,400 tax credit to married couples filing jointly. For most middle-class couples, the tax cut we are proposing is a better proposal. Under our plan, two-income couples filing jointly could deduct 20 percent of whichever of their 2 incomes is lower. For example, a couple earning \$35,000—split \$20,000 and \$15,000—would get a \$3,000 tax cut. A couple earning \$50,000—\$25,000 each—would get a \$5,000 tax cut.

Another difference between our marriage penalty tax cut and the one Republicans proposed last year is that our tax cut is factored into the Earned Income Tax Credit, so couples—like so many of the couples in my state of South Dakota—couples earning less than \$30,000—can still receive it, even if they have no income tax liability.

We also need to close the pay gap between men and women.

In 1963, President Kennedy signed the Equal Pay Act, making it illegal for employers to pay women less than men for the same job. Thirty-six years later, women in this country still earn, on average, \$9,000 a year less than men. Over a lifetime, the average American woman loses \$420,000 in wages and benefits because of this pay gap.

Today, when women provide more than half the income in two-thirds of America's families, and all the income in 2 out of every 5 families, this continued pay gap is just anti-woman. It's anti-family. Our bill will help narrow the gap by strengthening enforcement of the Equal Pay Act, toughening penalties for employers who break the law; and increasing the remedies available to women who suffer wage discrimination.

Increasing the minimum wage. Cutting the marriage penalty tax. Closing the pay gap. All of these things will help increase families' economic security today. We also need to help people plan for a secure economic future. That's the other half of our family-income package.

I talk to people all the time who tell me they're worried they won't have the "luxury" of retirement. Democrats believe we don't have the luxury of ignoring the coming retirement crisis. We need to deal with the serious issue of retirement security—in this Congress.

It is not OK that fewer than half of all American workers have pensions. That is why we are re-introducing our proposal to significantly increase the number of workers with pensions, and strengthen pension security. Our bill makes it easier and cheaper for small businesses to offer pension plans. It also strengthens auditing and other security measures designed to protect pension funds from misuse and mismanagement—so the pensions workers earn are actually there when they retire.

In addition, our bill changes some of the old rules about pensions to match the new reality of the way Americans work. Most people now switch jobs many times in their careers. That makes it hard for them to build up a significant pension. Our proposal makes it easier for workers to take their pensions with them when they change jobs. It also reduces from 5 to 3 years the time it takes to become "vested" in a 401(k) plan; and it allows workers who don't have pension coverage to build their own retirement savings through direct contributions from their paycheck into an IRA.

The other thing this Congress must do to increase Americans' retirement security is protect Social Security.

We don't need a detailed Democratic plan to save Social Security, or a detailed Republican plan. We need a detailed American plan to save Social Security. And we're ready and willing to work with our Republican colleagues to produce one. But until a plan is signed into law, we all need to keep our commitment to save Social Security first.

Some people are suggesting that we can walk away from that commitment now because the surplus projections are bigger today than we expected. They want to change the rules and make it easier to spend the surplus.

Let me be very clear: Senate Democrats will do everything in our power to prevent this from happening—until we fix Social Security. It doesn't matter how large the projected surplus is. We didn't go through all the hard work of balancing the budget just so Congress could once again start spending money we don't have and driving up the deficit.

We don't have a Social Security crisis today. But we could create a crisis for the future if we start spending the surplus now, before we know how much it will cost to keep Social Security solvent once the Baby Boomers start to retire.

Instead of making it easier to raid Social Security, let's work together in this Congress to save it. If our predecessors could summon the political will 60 years ago, during the worst economic times in our history, to create Social Security, surely we can summon the will, during the best economic times in a generation, to preserve it.

We also need to increase the personal security of America's families.

This year, for the sixth year in a row, crime is down in America. That's the longest period of decline in 25 years. Our fourth bill, S. 9, the Safe Schools, Safe Streets and Secure Borders Act of 1999, builds on the juvenile crime bill introduced by Senator LEAHY in the 105th Congress. It will help reduce crime even further by targeting violent crime in our schools. Reforming the juvenile justice system. Combating gang violence. Cracking down on the sale and use of illegal drugs. Giving police and prosecutors more tools and resources to fight street crime, inter-

national crime and terrorism. And strengthening the rights of crime victims.

In 1994, we made a commitment to put 100,000 new police officers on the street in communities all across America. Our new crime bill builds on that commitment by enabling communities to hire an additional 25,000 police officers through the COPS program.

It also expands Senator BIDEN's Violence Against Women Act—providing more money for more police officers, more support for prosecutors, more prevention programs, and more shelters and other services for victims of domestic and sexual violence.

It strengthens federal laws against hate crimes.

And it sets a national drunk-driving standard of .08 percent blood alcohol.

The final bill in our leadership package is S. 10, the Health Protection and Assistance for Older Americans Act.

Democrats have always made protecting Medicare and older Americans a top priority. Six weeks from now, this Congress will receive a report from the Bipartisan Commission on the Future of Medicare. Senate Democrats will consider the Commission's proposals carefully.

But there are 3 proposals we should all be able to agree on now—even before we see the Commission's report—to improve the health and lives of older Americans and their families.

The first proposal addresses a serious health care gap in our country—we refer to it as the "Medicare buy-in" proposal, which Senator MOYNIHAN introduced in the 105th Congress. It contains 3 parts. First, it allows people between ages of 55 and 65, and their spouses, to buy into Medicare when their employer downsizes, or their plant shuts down.

Second, it allows people between 62 and 65 who don't have access to group coverage to buy into Medicare. Participants don't have to be retired to be eligible. Some might work for small firms that don't offer benefits, or be self-employed or work part-time in a job that doesn't provide health benefits.

Both of these new coverage options are largely self-financing. The people "buying in" will pay premiums, just as they would for private health insurance.

The third part of our proposal is designed to help retirees whose promised health benefits are canceled. It allows these retirees to buy into their former employers' company health plan until they turn 65—a much more affordable option than buying private individual insurance.

We know what people between 55 and 65 are twice as likely as someone just 10 years younger to experience heart disease, cancer and other major health problems. They have less access to health care coverage. They're at greater risk of losing their coverage. And, they're the fastest-growing age group in our Nation. By the year 2010, the number of Americans between 55 and 65

will increase by 60 percent. Let's close this critical gap in our health care system now, before it gets worse.

I also want to tell my colleagues that—although it is not part of our package today—Democrats will be working on a proposal to expand basic Medicare coverage to include prescription drugs. There is no reason that seniors should have to choose between buying medicine and buying groceries.

We will also be making reauthorization of the Older Americans Act a top priority for this Congress. That is the second part of our seniors package.

The Older Americans Act provides "Meals on Wheels," counseling and other vital support services that allow older Americans to maintain their dignity and independence. Authorization for it expired in 1995. Older Americans deserve better. Democrats will be seeking not only appropriate funding, but improvements as well, and Senator MIKULSKI will help lead that effort.

The third proposal in our seniors package will help individuals and their families cope with the financial and emotional strains of long-term care. The centerpiece of this proposal is a new \$1,000 tax credit. We'll also help communities create "one-stop" centers that provide counseling and support, including respite care, to family care givers. And, we will create a model long-term care insurance program that will be open to federal employees and retirees and their families. We'll use the negotiated-savings power of the federal government to provide long term care insurance at 15-20 percent below market prices.

That is our leadership package, Senate Democrats' first 5 priorities for the 106th Congress. Pass a real Patients' Bill of Right. Strengthen our children's schools. Increase family incomes. Make our schools and neighborhoods safer. And help older Americans and their families by strengthening Medicare, supporting programs that help seniors maintain their independence, and helping individuals and their families with the financial and emotional costs of long-term care.

#### OTHER TOP PRIORITIES

Senate Democrats are also introducing 5 other bills today. They, too, are very important priorities for our caucus—and our Nation.

S. 16 is the Congressional Election Campaign Spending Limit and Reform Act. We must end the money chase in politics. It's out of control, and it's destroying people's faith in government, and the ability of government to function. We all know that.

This bill sets voluntary spending limits for Senate candidates—including limits on candidates' personal spending—in exchange for substantially reduced TV costs. It also bans "soft money" contributions to national parties, curbs the use of so-called "issue ads" and "independent expenditures," and strengthens laws against foreign campaign contributions.

S. 17, the Child Care ACCESS Act, introduced by Senator DODD, gives work-

ing parents more safe, affordable child care choices. It includes subsidies and tax credits to help low- and middle-income parents pay for child care, and tax incentives for companies that offer child care for their workers. It also helps states improve pay for child care teachers, and makes other changes that will improve the quality of child care. In addition, it creates more and better after-school programs, so children aren't home alone. And, it provides a new tax credit for "stay at home parents."

Full-day child care can cost anywhere from \$4,000 a year to \$10,000—as much as tuition at a public university. By passing this bill, we can ease some of the financial strain on working families and make sure America's children are safe and well-cared for while their parents are at work.

S. 18, introduced by Senator HARKIN, is the SAFER Meat and Poultry Act. America has the safest food supply in the world. We need to make sure it stays that way. This bill will help by giving USDA the authority to order mandatory recalls of unsafe meat and poultry products instead of relying on voluntary recalls. It also authorizes USDA to levy fines for food violations. The bottom line: it gives USDA the tools it needs to make sure the meat and poultry we buy at the grocery store and eat at restaurants is free of e-coli, salmonella and other harmful bacteria.

In the coming months, Senate Democrats will also be proposing additional new safeguards to ensure that the produce and processed foods Americans eat also meet the highest safety standards.

S. 19 is our Agricultural Safety Net and Market Competitiveness Act of 1999. It is the product of many senators' efforts to bring to rural America some of the same prosperity the rest of America is enjoying.

America's family farmers are currently experiencing their worst economic crisis in at least a decade—and possibly since the Great Depression. This crisis is undermining the economic and social fabric of rural communities all across America. But the implications effect all consumers, regardless of where they live.

Our bill will help family farmers and rural communities get through this crisis by restoring the agricultural safety net, and by more aggressively enforcing laws against anti-competitive business practices in meatpacking and other agriculture industries. It will also reduce the chances of future farm crises by helping producers tap new markets for their products at home, and by ensuring that American farmers have fair access to foreign markets.

Our final bill, S. 20, the Brownfields and Environmental Cleanup Act of 1999, is being introduced by Senator LAUTENBERG. It encourages people to buy and redevelop the tens of thousands of contaminated former industrial sites in communities across the

country. Specifically, it provides grants through EPA to help local communities evaluate and clean up contaminated industrial sites. It also provides relief from potential Superfund liability to owners and potential owners who had no hand in causing the contamination. By taking these steps, we can reduce public health risks and help create new jobs and opportunities where they are badly needed.

We do not claim to have all the right answers. But in these proposals, we believe we have at least identified the rights issues. It's clear these are the issues working families want this Congress to deal with. They've told us so time and time again.

Tonight in his State of the Union address, the President will outline his agenda for the coming year. We welcome his ideas. We also welcome the ideas of our Republican colleagues. We are ready to work with the White House and with our colleagues on both sides of the aisle in the spirit of consensus and teamwork to do the work the American people expect us to do.

Last month, there was a dinner in Washington honoring the political leaders who negotiated the "Good Friday Agreement," the historic Northern Ireland peace accord. These are people who have found a way somehow to overcome ancient hatreds and create a new government based on peace and justice. Their new government is still very fragile, and it faces many challenges. But the people at this dinner were convinced they would succeed. As one woman put it, "There's no turning back. For once, we're doing what Americans do. We believe in ourselves."

We must believe in ourselves. No generation of Americans has ever said "we can't meet the great challenges of our time." No Congress has ever said that. And this Congress must not say it, either. Let us agree to work together to help America's families. Let us believe in ourselves.

I yield the floor.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I'm proud to join my colleagues in introducing the Democratic agenda for the 106th Congress. I am so proud that the people of Maryland have returned me to the United States Senate for a third term. I promised to continue fighting for their agenda.

That agenda means keeping a robust economy. It means fighting for a safety net for seniors. Maryland's agenda means getting behind our kids and our families. It means fighting for safe streets and a safer world. It means that we have to continue to invest in science and technology. The legislation we are introducing today will help us achieve these goals. It is a Democratic agenda—and it's Maryland's agenda. I would like to highlight a few initiatives that are particularly important.

Our agenda strengthens the safety net for seniors. I believe that when we say "honor your mother and your father," it is not only a good commandment to live by but it is good public

policy to govern by. What does that mean? First of all, it means helping Americans with long term care.

Since my first days in Congress, I have been fighting to help people afford the costs of long-term care. Ten years ago, I introduced legislation to change the cruel rules that forced elderly couples to go bankrupt before they could get any help in paying for nursing home care. Because of my legislation, the American Association of Retired Persons tells me that we've kept over six hundred thousand people out of poverty and stopped liens on family farms.

The Democratic agenda will make it easier for families to provide long term care. The agenda also includes my bill to provide long-term care insurance to federal employees and retirees. This provision is a down-payment on extending long-term care insurance to everyone. It will create a model for other employers to use in providing long-term care insurance for their workers.

The Democratic agenda also includes measures to expand access to Medicare for individuals aged 55 to 64, and, importantly, calls for reauthorizing the Older Americans Act, an effort I helped lead in the last Congress. Although we did not complete action on the reauthorization last year, I hope my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will recognize how critical the OAA programs are to American seniors. In 1994, the last year OAA was authorized, it provided health and welfare information to 3 million seniors, served 240 million meals to low- and moderate-income seniors, and provided more than 800,000 seniors with critical transportation to and from doctor visits and other needed services.

We also recognize that we must get behind our kids and families. We know that our children are our most important resource. Our Democratic agenda puts these words into action. We put the Public Schools Excellence Act at the top of our agenda. That bill will improve achievement by helping communities lower class sizes and help teachers get the training they need for the twenty-first century.

We're also helping communities create structured after school initiatives. The Democratic agenda will enable one million children to participate in safe and constructive after school programs. We'll do this by helping schools and community groups set up after school programs that provide academic enrichment, tutoring, recreation or other beneficial activities.

But we know that we've also got to get behind our families by making sure they have high-quality, affordable health care. The Democratic Patients' Bill of Rights will do just that. It will provide consumers of HMO health care enforceable patient protections. Democrats believe that health care decisions need to be made in the consultation room, not the board room.

This legislation will provide 161 million Americans with critical protec-

tions for their health care. It will ensure the right to treatment that is medically necessary by the most appropriate health care provider, using best practices. It will provide continuity of care and patients will have the right to hold their health plans accountable for medical decisions even if it means taking the company to court. Right now, we don't have managed care—we have manacled care, and the Democratic Patients' Bill of Rights will help make sure we put patients ahead of profits.

We're also fighting for a safe world for our children to grow up in. The Democratic crime initiative focuses on prevention, police and punishment. It continues to put more cops on the streets. It helps schools stay free of drugs and violence. And it gives law enforcement more tools to fight international drug pushers and terrorists—who threaten the safety of our world.

We will also focus on ensuring our nation's food supply is safe for consumption. S. 18, The SAFER Meat and Poultry Act, will be a top initiative in the coming Congress. Every person should have confidence that food is fit to eat and imported food is as safe as food produced domestically. Our food supply has gone global. We need global food safety. Too frequently, Americans suffer food borne illness and even death due to the contamination of imported foods. Just last year, infected raspberries were found in my home state, in Montgomery County.

I introduced the Safety of Imported Food Act 1998 and will work with the Democratic leadership to implement safe, effective, and common-sense improvements to our food inspection process, and authorize enforcement tools needed to revolutionize the process and ensure compliance with safety laws.

The Democratic agenda seeks to strengthen our economy by increasing the economic security of working Americans. It does this by increasing the minimum wage and by decreasing taxes that unfairly target working families—like the marriage penalty.

Mr. President, the Democratic agenda is the American agenda. It will help us meet the day to day needs of the American people—and it will also help prepare our nation for the twenty-first century.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CRAPO). The Senator from Massachusetts is recognized.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, will the floor manager be kind enough to yield 10 minutes?

Mr. DURBIN. I would be happy to yield 10 minutes to the Senator from Massachusetts.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts is recognized for 10 minutes.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, first of all, I wish to join our colleagues in commending our leader for an excellent presentation on the unfinished agenda of the past Congress, as these are really the opening moments of the

Congress in terms of dealing with our legislative agenda. It is entirely appropriate that our leaders speak to what we hope will be accomplished during this Congress. Tonight we will listen to the President of the United States meet his responsibilities under the Constitution, addressing the State of the Union. In the next day or so we will hear from the Democratic leader in the House of Representatives, Mr. GEPHARDT, who will outline an agenda for the country as well.

I must at this time say how impressed I am with the outlines of this very thoughtful proposal, a real challenge for the Congress as we begin our important legislative undertakings.

We currently have extraordinary economic prosperity in the United States. It is the excellent leadership of President Clinton, Vice President GORE, and the Administration that has put us into a position to have the strongest economy we have had in any recent period of time, with both economic growth and price stability. That is reflected in enhanced hopes and dreams for working families all across this country.

There are those who have not participated in that economic expansion as much as others, however. We hear the concerns expressed by our Democratic leader, and we will also hear the President tonight speak about how we can make our society a fairer and a more just society and how we can enhance the opportunity to reach out to those who are struggling hard, playing by the rules, trying to provide for their families, who also ought to be able to enjoy the kind of prosperity that we are experiencing.

The Democratic leader outlined a number of different areas with which working families in the United States are most concerned. Sure, we have many—about 75, 78 percent—of our working families that have some kind of health insurance, even though those numbers are gradually dropping and have been dropping quite precipitously in the last 3 or 4 years. But we want to make sure that those working families are going to be able to have health care decisions made by their doctors and by their nurses and not by the insurance companies.

That is why I joined with our Democratic leader in strong support of the Patients' Bill of Rights, a proposal that is effectively supported by every major medical society, every patient organization, and every nursing organization in the country.

We have asked and invited our Republican friends and colleagues to join with us. We have tried to point out the inadequacies of their particular proposal in the fact that it only covers a third of the Americans who are covered by any kind of health insurance, leaving two-thirds of the members of the American family out. But we have been unable to get them to join with us. The professional health community says the way to go is with the health care

bill of rights as introduced by the Democratic leader.

Mr. President, the Democratic leader and the President outline another major concern that working families have, and that is the quality of education for their children. Sure, there is primary responsibility for education at the local level, and there is a State interest, but it should also be a matter of national priority. We are looking for partnerships. We are looking for ways of being able to work together.

This particular proposal which the Democratic leader has outlined, has recognized what the General Accounting Office recognized over 2 years ago, and that is that the cost to repair public schools in the United States of America, if they were all to be repaired, would be \$110 billion. The President and the Democratic Party stand for trying to help and assist local communities to provide for that reconstruction and, importantly, the modernization of the schools, to work in partnership with the States—not only in terms of the construction but also to make sure we are going to have a qualified teacher in every classroom, that the classrooms, particularly in the early grades, are going to be smaller, and that there are going to be the afterschool programs to help keep children out of trouble and to help and assist children who may be falling further behind to be able to enhance their academic achievements and accomplishments. That makes a great deal of sense, Mr. President.

These particular proposals will be advanced for debate and discussion in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. We are looking forward to that. We are doing the country's business in working in partnership with States and local communities.

There is also urgency, in terms of ensuring that the parents of working families are going to be secure, in dealing with Social Security. We will hear an outline this evening. The President was good enough to invite Democrats and Republicans to come to the White House and to sit down with him to try to find some common ground. We will hear tonight that he is still strongly committed to trying to work this out in a bipartisan, nonpartisan way. It is the only way that that can be managed. And that is going to be very important. It will be a top priority for our seniors, our children, and our working families.

As the leader has pointed out, there will be an additional program to try to help and assist with many of the needs of the children of this country. That is going to be in legislation which he has outlined here today and which many of us have been interested in in terms of the early start programs, the pre-K programs. We talked to the Nation and made a commitment with the Governors some years ago that every child was going to be ready for school. We have to continue with that commitment. We want every child to be ready

for school. We want tough standards at schools. We want to make sure that graduation is more than just an attendance program—that it means children have learned in these schools. I believe we are going to hear about excellent programs this evening and we have the Public Schools Excellence Act's inclusion in education.

The list goes on for the elderly, including the continuation of the Older Americans Act, the Early Medicare Access Act, and Medicare coverage of prescription drugs. I hope we are going to be able, in this Congress, to address the issue of prescription drugs, which is of urgency for so many of our elderly and citizens with disabilities. It is such a burden—we find many of our citizens have to make a choice between the prescriptions that they need and a good meal.

Finally, I want to just mention the sense of hope that we have, many of us, as we look forward to this Congress. Just last week at the White House, the President indicated his strong support for legislation which has been introduced by Senator JEFFORDS from Vermont, Senator ROTH from Delaware, and cosponsored by myself and Senator MOYNIHAN, with regard to ensuring that those individuals, some 54 million Americans who have some disability, are going to be able to work without losing the benefits that they need.

The disabled want to work. They can work. But we have a system, under Medicaid, which discourages them from working by providing financial penalties and the denial of services if they go out and work. We have crafted an effective program that will encourage those disabled to participate in our workforce and in our workplace. They have been excluded for far too long. This legislation starts off as one of the principal pieces of bipartisan legislation, which augurs well, if we are going to be serious about dealing with serious issues. I am very hopeful that this will be one of the first pieces of legislation that will pass. It will make a great deal of difference, not just to the disabled but to all Americans, because who can say today that by this evening they are not going to face some kind of challenge and be faced with some kind of disability as well?

Mr. President, I am hopeful that we will be able to make progress on this agenda. I commend our Democratic leader for advancing it. I think it is one which demands action, and I look forward to working with our colleagues to see what can be achieved in this Congress for improving the quality of life for working families in this Congress.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the full text of my prepared remarks be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD as follows:

Today, Democrats introduce legislation to carry out our priorities in the Senate and create greater opportunities for working

families, strengthen our schools, and ensure that citizens are cared for properly in their later years.

We must complete our unfinished business of the last Congress—the Patients' Bill of Rights, high standards for schools, saving Social Security, and raising the minimum wage.

But we also have new ideas for the new century to help move our country forward more effectively.

First, we must improve the quality of health care for all Americans.

Today, we renew the battle in Congress to enact a strong Patients' Bill of Rights to protect American families from abuses by HMOs and managed care health plans that too often put profits over patients' needs.

Our Patients' Bill of Rights will protect families against arbitrary decisions that can rob average citizens of their savings and their peace of mind, and often their health and their very lives. Doctors and patients should make medical decisions, not insurance company accountants. For the millions of Americans who rely on health insurance to protect them and their loved ones when serious illness strikes, the Patients' Bill of Rights is truly a matter of life and death.

Soon, I also intend to offer legislation to deal with an increasingly urgent problem. Elderly and disabled Americans on Medicare spend a disproportionate share of their income on prescription drugs. The elderly make up 12 percent of the population, but account for one-third of all prescription drug purchases. The lack of insurance coverage for these expenses is the most serious gap in Medicare today. Virtually all employer plans offer this coverage, but Medicare does not. The elderly are practically the last group who pay full retail prices for drugs. And the price tag is growing by an astonishing 16 percent each year.

The time has come to address this glaring problem, and I intend to introduce legislation soon to do so.

Today, we also renew the battle for the Early Medicare Access Act. I commend Senator MOYNIHAN for his strong leadership on this issue. More than 3 million Americans aged 55 to 64 have no health insurance today. In the past year, the number of the uninsured in this age group increased at a faster rate than any other segment of the population. They are too young for Medicare, and unable to afford private coverage.

In response to this need, our proposal will enable many uninsured Americans between the ages of 55 and 64 to purchase coverage under Medicare.

In addition to addressing America's health care needs, we must continue our campaign to improve the quality of public schools and help children meet high educational standards.

A high school degree must be more than just a certificate of attendance. It must be a certificate of achievement.

We made progress last year in improving the quality of education, but we are still far from where we need to be. There are serious problems in the nation's schools, and they deserve serious solutions. We are introducing the Public Schools Excellence Act of 1999 to meet the pressing educational needs of communities and schools across the country. Our comprehensive bill addresses four key challenges facing public schools.

First, it will help communities rebuild, modernize and reduce overcrowding in more than 5,000 local public schools.

Second, it will reduce class size by building on the down payment in last year's budget agreement to hire more teachers. Our legislation authorizes a six-year effort to help local schools meet the goal of hiring 100,000 new, qualified teachers, especially for the lower grades.

Third, our bill will ensure that there is a well-trained teacher in every classroom in America. Such teachers are essential for student achievement. Our bill will invest \$1.2 billion next year to provide scholarships to recruit outstanding new teachers and to enable current teachers to improve their skills through mentoring programs and other professional development.

Fourth, our proposal will expand the nation's after-school programs. Every day, over 5 million children are left home alone after school. Hundreds of thousands of families are on waiting lists. By investing in after-school programs, we keep children away from drugs, off the streets, and out of trouble, and provide a wholesome learning environment in the afternoons.

Improving education is clearly one of our highest national priorities. But in order for all children to achieve their full potential, we must make significant investments in children long before they ever walk through schoolhouse doors.

Ten years ago, the nation's governors said their number one educational goal was that by the year 2000, all children should enter school "ready to learn." Unfortunately, we will not reach this goal by 2000. One of my priorities in the new Congress is to renew this battle. We are already fighting hard for smaller classes, better teachers, and more modern school facilities, but we can't neglect to invest in education at the very earliest ages.

The next priority is save Social Security. Few issues facing Congress today will have greater long term impact on the lives of more Americans than strengthening Social Security for future generations. For two-thirds of America's senior citizens, Social Security retirement benefits provide more than half their annual income. Without Social Security, half the nation's elderly would be living in poverty.

But it is much more than a retirement program. Thirty percent of its benefits support disabled persons of all ages and their families, and the surviving dependents of breadwinners who have died prematurely. In 1996, Social Security benefits kept over one million children out of poverty as well.

Radical change is unnecessary and unwise. We face a Social Security problem, not a Social Security crisis. The program can be made healthy without dismantling it in the process. It now has enough resources to fully fund current benefits for more than 30 years. If we plan for the future by addressing this problem now, the long-run revenue shortfall can be eliminated with relatively minor adjustments to the system.

Some have suggested that the only way to save Social Security is to privatize a major part of it. Nothing could be further from the truth. In reality, diverting a portion of the payroll taxes from Social Security into private retirement accounts would only make the future Social Security shortfall far greater and would necessitate sharp cuts to the very benefits that senior citizens rely on.

Private accounts, subject to the ups and downs of the stock market, are fine as a supplement to Social Security. But, they are no substitute for Social Security. The guaranteed benefits which Social Security currently provides are the best foundation on which to build for a secure retirement.

More than half of the long-run shortfall can be closed by merely broadening the types of investments made by the trust fund, just as state and municipal public pension funds have done routinely for years. The remainder of the shortfall can be eliminated by several other minor adjustments to the program—without reducing benefit levels.

The overwhelming majority of today's workers would be unaffected by these

changes. Current and future beneficiaries would be fully protected, and the guarantee of a secure retirement for America's workers would be preserved through the 21st century.

Another Democratic priority for this year is a much-needed increase in the minimum wage. Today, far too many workers work full time, and yet cannot make ends meet. Minimum wage workers who work 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year earn just \$10,700-\$2,900 below the poverty level for a family of three.

Under the leadership of President Clinton, America has enjoyed 6 years of extraordinary economic growth. Unemployment is at its lowest level in a generation. Inflation is the lowest in 40 years. But for too many fellow citizens, it is someone else's boom. Twelve million working Americans are still earning poverty-level wages.

That is why we say now is the time to raise the minimum wage. The bill we introduce today will increase the level by a dollar—50 cents this year and 50 cents next year—and bring the minimum wage to \$6.15 an hour by September 2000.

We know who minimum wage workers are. They clean our office buildings. They are teachers aides in classrooms. They care for the chronically ill and the elderly. They are child care workers. They are aides in nursing homes. They sell groceries at the supermarket, and serve coffee at local shops.

In good conscience, as we celebrate the nation's continuing prosperity, we should not consign the millions of Americans who have these jobs to continuing poverty. We must raise the minimum wage, and we must raise it now.

Finally, I look forward to early action by the Senate on the landmark, bipartisan disability legislation that Senator JEFFORDS, Senator ROTH, Senator MOYNIHAN, and I announced last week. Over 75 percent of Americans with disabilities are unemployed. Most want to work—to enjoy the same fruits of their labor and fulfillment of their talents as everyone else in our society.

Our proposal makes this possible. It allows disabled Americans to take jobs without losing the Medicare and other benefits that are their lifeline. It also provides valuable job training and rehabilitation assistance that will give persons with disabilities the skills they need to have and hold a job.

These are important initiatives for the American future—for children, for working families, for the elderly, and for the disabled. These are the kinds of issues that the Senate should already be taking up. It is time to bring the impeachment trial to a fair and quick conclusion, so that we can deal more effectively with these challenges that are of much higher concern to working families.

Mr. BROWNBAC. I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 10 minutes in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

#### SOCIAL SECURITY, EDUCATION, AND TAXES

Mr. BROWNBAC. Mr. President, I appreciate the opportunity to address this body for the first time in this legislative session. We will have an exciting session full of business that the American people need conducted in this body.

I am particularly excited about the opportunity for us to deal with issues such as Social Security, creating a real Social Security trust fund instead of robbing from that trust fund, as has taken place for so many years. That

money needs to be saved, needs to be used, needs to be kept for the senior citizens or those soon to retire in this Nation. In this legislative session we have that opportunity to create that new Social Security trust fund. That is the top agenda item for the Republicans in the U.S. Senate: Social Security preservation and protection. We need to fight and get it done and do it in a bipartisan fashion.

Second is education, emphasizing local control of education. The notion of creating a national school board is not one that many of us are too enthusiastic about, feeling as if we have too much control out of Washington and not enough local control, not enough people on a localized basis saying here is what we need to do with education, and the notion that we are going to create a national school board is one that a number of us would be opposed to. But helping local units of government get access to Federal funds, more access to put more of that money in the classroom, is something many of us would be very supportive of and be excited about doing, and we are going to attack that tough issue of education to make the schools of this country better for the children of this country.

Third is taxes. Taxes are too high. It is time to reduce the marginal rates. It is time to eliminate the marriage penalty that is a penalty on married couples in this country. That is a ridiculous tax, if you think about it and the difficulties we are facing as a nation. Those three top items—Social Security, education, taxes—are lead items the Republican Senate is going to be putting forward, and I look forward to a hearty session full of those meaty items, dealt with, hopefully, in a bipartisan fashion. I welcome colleagues from the other side of the aisle to help us in solving those difficult issues.

#### TRIBUTE TO REV. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Mr. BROWNBAC. Mr. President, the issue I specifically want to address this morning, more than just our legislative agenda, is something that we celebrated yesterday, and that is the tribute to Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the celebration we had yesterday, on January 18, when we once again paused to remember Dr. King, a man who changed the course of history and America's conscience. Dr. King is one of the few individuals throughout history who has so nobly exemplified the principles of sacrificial love and devotion.

Yesterday, in Kansas, I attended two Dr. King celebrations, one in Topeka and one in Kansas City, and both full of people rededicating themselves to the life of Dr. King and what he had committed himself to and what he had done. Dr. King dedicated his life to the advancement of individuals in need. He selflessly gave of his time and energy—and his life—in order to bring this country to a higher moral plateau. Dr.